

Fort Matanzas

National Monument
Florida

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Official Map and Guide

Matanzas Inlet was the scene of crucial events in Spanish colonial history. The massacre of French soldiers here in 1565 was Spain's opening move in establishing a colony in Florida. The construction of Fort Matanzas in 1740–42 was Spain's last effort to ward off British encroachments on St. Augustine.

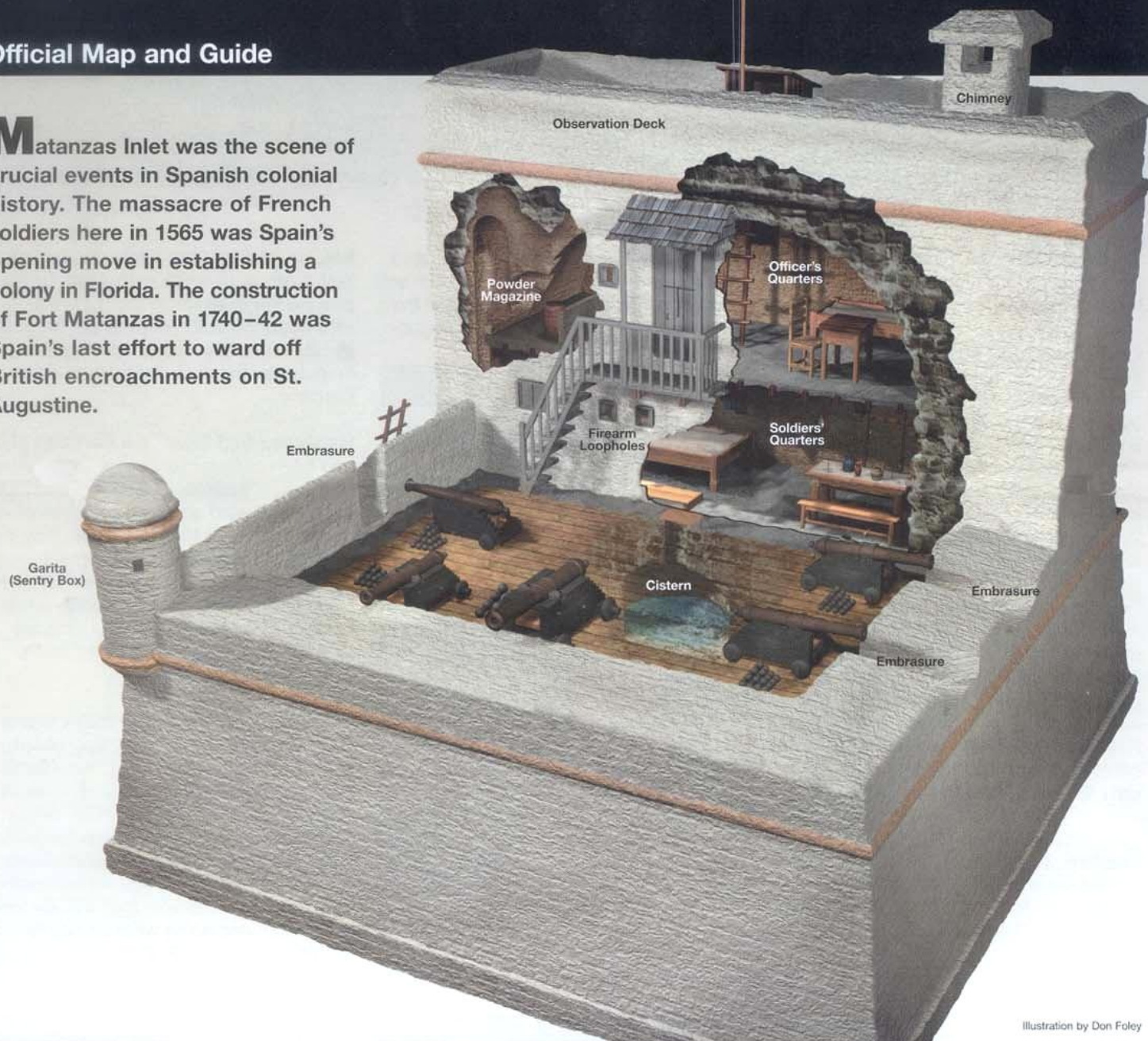
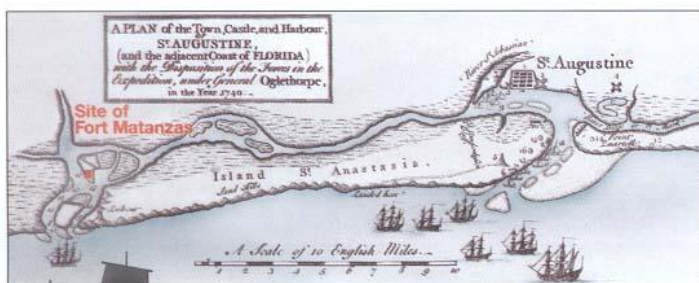


Illustration by Don Foley

Outpost of Empire

Since its founding in 1565, the military outpost town of St. Augustine had been the heart of Spain's coastal defenses in Florida. After the completion of the Castillo de San Marcos in 1695, the town had only one weakness: Fourteen miles to the south Matanzas Inlet allowed access to the Matanzas River, by which enemy vessels could attack the town from the rear—out of range of the Castillo's cannons. Spain had good reason to fear attack. Beginning with Francis Drake's raid on St. Augustine in 1586, England had repeatedly harassed the Spanish colony. In 1740 troops from the British colony of Georgia, lead by Gov. James Oglethorpe, blockaded St. Augustine inlet and began a 39-day siege of the town. On a few occasions during the siege Spanish vessels managed to evade the British blockade and resupply the town. With the siege broken and with the onset of the hurricane season, Oglethorpe gave up the attack and returned to Georgia.

The Spanish learned their lesson: If the British had controlled the inlet, then they could have starved the town into surrender. Construction of a masonry fort began soon afterwards, with carpenters and masons from St. Augustine and labor supplied by convicts, slaves, and additional troops from Cuba. In 1742, with the fort near completion, Oglethorpe arrived off the inlet with 12 ships. The fort's cannon fire drove off his scouting boats and the warships left; it had passed its first test. As part of the Treaty of Paris following the French and Indian War, Florida was transferred to Britain in 1763. At the conclusion of the American Revolution, a second Treaty of Paris returned Florida to Spain in 1784. Spain spent little maintaining Fort Matanzas, even as erosion and rainwater took their toll. By the time Spain transferred Florida to the United States in 1819, the fort was so badly deteriorated that its soldiers could no longer live inside. The United States took possession in 1821 but never occupied the fort.



Hargrett Library, University of Georgia

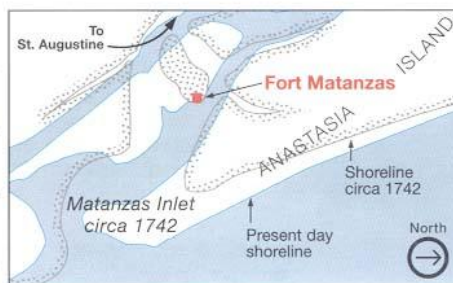


Illustration by Richard Schlecht



Drawn after the 1740 siege, this map shows St. Augustine's vulnerability. Vessels entering Matanzas Inlet, at left, could sail up the river and attack St. Augustine from

the rear. After 1742 Fort Matanzas defended the inlet from entry by enemy vessels and kept open St. Augustine's communications line with Havana.

Erosion and shifting tidal deposits have so altered the inlet since the 18th century that the fort is now about a half-mile farther from the open sea. In 1742 the inlet was close

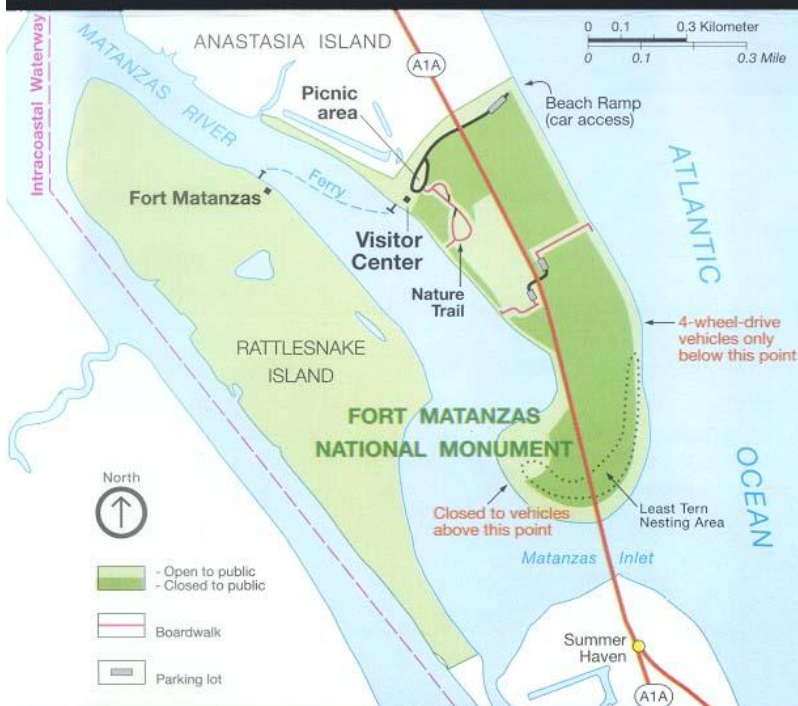
enough that any ships trying to enter came within range of the fort's guns. The Lieutenant at right carries out his most basic mission: scanning the inlet for enemy sails.

The Tower at Matanzas

Fort Matanzas—50 feet on each side with a 30-foot tower—was built of coquina, a local shellstone. Lime for the mortar was made by burning oyster shells. A foundation of close-set pine pilings driven deep into the marshy ground gave the fort stability. Soldiers were rotated from St. Augustine for one-month duty tours at Matanzas, the normal complement being the *cabo* (officer-in-charge), four infantrymen, and two gunners. More could be assigned to this remote outpost when international tensions increased, up to the planned maximum of 50 during a crisis. The soldiers lived and ate together in a sparsely-furnished room off the gundeck; the officer lived in the vaulted room above.

The fort could bring five guns to bear on the inlet: four six-pounders and one 18-pounder. All of the guns could reach the inlet, which in 1742 was less than a half-mile away. Loopholes in the south wall of the tower allowed the infantrymen to fire their muskets from inside the fort. Besides warning St. Augustine of enemy vessels and driving them off if necessary, the fort also served as a rest stop, coast guard station, and a place where vessels heading for St. Augustine could get advice on navigating the river. Its primary mission, though, was maintaining control of Matanzas Inlet. After thwarting British attempts to gain the inlet in 1742, the fort never again fired its guns in battle.

Park Map and Information



Fort Matanzas National Monument is 14 miles south of Saint Augustine and is reached via Fla. A1A on Anastasia Island. The park is open 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily; closed on December 25. There is no admission fee. The park consists of almost 300 acres on Rattlesnake and Anastasia islands. The visitor center is open, when staffing allows, from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily. An eight-minute film about the fort and the area's history is shown. Restrooms are located at the visitor center parking lot. A passenger ferry carries visitors to the fort, weather permitting, from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The ferry and the fort are not wheelchair accessible. A dock

where the fort can be viewed from across the river is wheelchair accessible, as are the visitor center, restrooms, and a 0.6-mile boardwalk nature trail.

For more information
Fort Matanzas National Monument
8635 A1A South
St. Augustine, FL 32080
904-471-0116
www.nps.gov/foma

Swimming A St. Johns County beach pass can be purchased to drive or park on the beach during the summer season. There are also free parking lots. Warning: Many vehicles driving on the beach get stuck in the sand and are caught by the rising tide. Ask a ranger about conditions.

For Your Safety Do not climb on the fort walls. Avoid the sharp oyster shells along the river bank. Beware of strong ocean currents. Do not swim near the inlet.

Regulations •Alcohol and firearms are prohibited. •No glass containers may be used on the beach. •Pets must be on a leash. Clean up after your pet. •Speed limit on the beach is 10 mph. •The fort may be visited only by ranger-led groups. •Help protect the fragile coquina structure by not climbing or sitting on the fort walls. •Docking of private vessels at the fort or letting off passengers is prohibited.

Exploring the Past and Present

1564 In the midst of the Protestant Reformation, King Philip II of Spain learned that the Frenchman René de Laudonnière had established Fort Caroline **1** in Florida. This concerned Philip, for the French colony sat on land claimed by Spain. Fort Caroline provided a perfect base for French attacks on Spanish treasure fleets sailing along the Florida coast on their return to Europe. Worst of all to the devoutly Catholic Philip, the settlers were Huguenots—French Protestants. Despite Philip's protests, Jean Ribault sailed from France in May 1565 with more than 600 soldiers and settlers to resupply Fort Caroline. Adm. Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, charged with establishing a settlement in Florida and with removing the French, sailed from Spain with some 800 people, arriving at the mouth of the St. Johns River **2** in August, shortly after Ribault. After a brief sea chase the Spanish retired south to the newly founded post **3** they had named St. Augustine.

Jean Ribault sailed on September 10 to attack St. Augustine, but a hurricane carried his ships far to the south, wrecking them on the Florida coast **4** between present-day Daytona Beach and Cape Canaveral.

At the same time, Menéndez led a force to attack Fort Caroline. With the French soldiers gone, Menéndez easily captured the settlement. Upon his return to St. August-

tine, he learned from Timucuan Indians that a group of white men were on the beach a few miles to the south. He marched with about 50 soldiers to where an inlet **5** blocked nearly 130 of the shipwrecked Frenchmen trying to get back to Fort Caroline.

Fatal Encounters

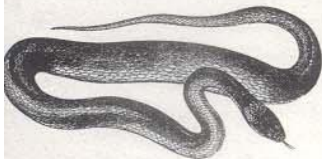


Menéndez told them how Fort Caroline had been captured and urged the French to surrender, but with no promise of clemency. Exhausted and having lost most of their weapons in the shipwreck, they did surrender. However, after they were brought across the inlet, Menéndez ordered them slain. Only sixteen were spared—a few professed Catholics and four artisans needed at the new settlement of St. Augustine.

Two weeks later the sequence of events was repeated. More French survivors appeared at the inlet, including Jean Ribault. Again the French surrendered and met the same fate as their fellows. In all, nearly 250 were killed. From that time, the inlet was called *Matanzas*, the Spanish word for “slaughters.” Was this an act motivated by religion, or with food already low, was Menéndez doing what he had to do for his colony’s survival?

Barrier Island Refuge

In preserving the site of historic events on Anastasia Island,



Congress also set aside a slice of an intact barrier island ecosystem. Distinct habitats harbor a number of species, several of which are listed as endangered or threatened. From May to August, the beach is the nesting site for sea turtles, including the loggerhead (threatened) and the green and leatherback (both endangered). The beach is also home to the ghost crab and the threatened least tern.

On the ocean side of the island, sea oats, legumes, and other hardy, salt-tolerant plants growing on the dunes help stabilize them with their extensive root systems and also provide cover for several animal species, such as the endangered Anastasia Island beach mouse.

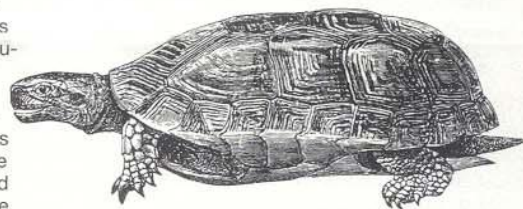
In the scrub areas, characterized by prickly pear cactus, bayberry, and greenbrier vines, the

gopher tortoise (right) digs branching burrows up to 30 feet into the dunes. Other species such as the gopher frog and the endangered eastern indigo snake (left) exploit the tortoise’s labor for their own shelter.

The highest part of the island is covered with coastal forest—old dunes on which larger plant species have taken root in the thick layer of decayed remains of pioneer species. Palms, red bay, and live oak provide a canopy under which diverse animal species such as spiders, lizards, raccoons, and the great horned owl (left) and other birds can survive. Berries and fruits on understory plants provide food for some of these animals.

Behind the dunes and forest lie the tidal creeks and marshes of the estuary, where salt water meets fresh. This is the most diverse habitat of the island. Herons and egrets feed on the rich supply of fish and crustaceans living in the salt marshes.

Ospreys and bald eagles fight over the osprey’s catch. Pelicans and terns dive head first into the river after the fish. Skimmers fly low to the water. Hawks swoop low over the grass. The tidal flats are alive with fiddler crabs waving their claws. Raccoons, owls, and night herons hunt at night. Marsh rabbits nibble on young sprouts in the morning. There is always action around the salt marsh.



The park is a nesting area for endangered and threatened animal species. Please observe any area closure signs. The ocean beaches, used by marine turtles for nesting and hatching, are closed to vehicles at night during the summer. To help preserve the fragile environment, do not walk or drive on the dunes and do not pick sea oats. Sea oats and other plants help hold the dunes in place. Individuals who cut, break, or in any way destroy sea oats or other plants are subject to fines and imprisonment.

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